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23. SIGHTING OF WALLCREEPER *TICHODROMA MURARIA* IN ASSAM AND MANIPUR

The wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* is a bird of higher elevations, usually preferring areas above 3,300 m in the mountains. However, in winter it may come down to the foothills, occasionally straggling into the plains. In north-eastern India, it was known only from Eastern Himalaya in Arunachal Pradesh as a winter visitor (Ali and Ripley 1987). Here I report two sightings, one each in Manipur and Assam.

While driving from Imphal in Manipur to Hailakandi in Assam, I saw a bird on a barren cliff by the side of NH 53 in Manipur at about 0845 hrs on January 20, 1996. The exact location was between Keithelambi and Tupul, about 40 km west of Imphal in Senapati district (24° 47' N, 93° 42' E), and at c. 1,100 m above msl. The bird soon flew off, showing its crimson wings. This was apparently the first record for Manipur.

The first record of wallcreeper in Assam was from Kaziranga National Park on December 19, 1994 (Barua and Sharma 1999). This sighting was significant and hence included in THE BIRDS OF ASSAM (Choudhury 2000). On March 25, 2001 at 0840 hrs, I saw one wallcreeper in flight on the banks of Jongrong Nullah in Mathanguri Beat area of Manas National Park (26° 42' N, 90° 59' E), at c. 100 m above msl. The bird flew from the woodland on the south bank to the north bank taking a north-westerly direction. Again, the crimson wings with white spots were conspicuous.

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24. PROBABLE HYBRIDISATION BETWEEN WEAVERBIRDS, *PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS* AND *PLOCEUS MANYAR*

The frequency and outcome of hybridisation between species determines the extent to which they remain genetically distinct and can evolve independently. For this reason, records of hybridisation in the wild are of interest from the evolution and speciation point of view.

I studied the breeding behaviour of weaverbird between 1998 and 2000 at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT-Asia), Patancheru, Andhra Pradesh, India. During this time, I discovered one nesting attempt involving a possible hybridisation between a male Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*) and a female Streaked Weaver (*P. manyar*). On September 11, 1998, I observed a female Streaked Weaver perched on a Baya Weaver nest at the "helmet" stage located in a small colony of about 3 males and 5 nests on an *Acacia nilotica* tree. When I next watched the colony, on September 24, a female Streaked Weaver (presumably the same individual) entered this same

nest (now with brood chamber complete), while being displayed to by a male Baya Weaver. Upon checking the contents of the nest the next day, I found three eggs (mean length and width: 21.63 x 14.97 mm). One of these eggs hatched on September 29, and I subsequently observed the female Streaked Weaver bring food into the nest. The nest was checked frequently until October 12, by when the single chick had grown substantially and was almost fully feathered. The two unhatched eggs remained in the nest. When I next returned, on October 23, I found the desiccated carcass of the chick and fragments of eggshell covered by loose strips of grass, typical of the nest having been occupied by the arboreal mouse *Vandaleuria oleracea*.

Were the eggs laid by this Streaked Weaver truly hybrid? Egg dimensions are of little use in addressing this question because the egg size is similar in both the species (Ali and Ripley 1978). However, since hybrids are often